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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Technical Meeting on the International
Decade of the World's Indigenous People
Geneva, 20-21 July 1995
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

CONSIDERATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Note by the Secretariat

1. In regard to the consultation of the Centre for Human Rights, undertaken by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Coordinator for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, with Governments, United Nations specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and indigenous organizations concerning suggestions relating to the programme of activities for the Decade, in response to General Assembly resolution 49/214 of 23 December 1994, the majority of the replies received came from indigenous organizations. The organizations drew attention to the following areas, in order of priority:

Training and education

2. In this field, emphasis was placed on the need to hold courses, forums, workshops, seminars and meetings at the national and international levels on international human rights law for indigenous people, involving indigenous professional personnel and leaders, as well as the establishment of comprehensive national education policies with a view to safeguarding respect for the distinctive values of indigenous people.

Economic rights, territorial rights and land

3. Mention was made of the importance of holding meetings of experts in the field of the economy, territories and land; the subjects discussed should include land recovery plans, boundary reorganization to overcome the fragmentation of indigenous people, promotion of bank loans for productive projects, market prospection for agricultural, handicraft and other products, protection of natural resources and the restructuring of traditional economic models, as well as programmes to eradicate evils caused by drug trafficking and terrorism.

Dissemination and publication of information

4. Attention was drawn to the value of promoting publications on human rights, indigenous rights, culture, celebration of the International Day of Indigenous People and knowledge of indigenous people, including intellectual property rights; and the establishment of periodicals and reviews which help to publicize progress and achievements in the fields concerned and then become means of training indigenous people, including the preparation and publication of practical guides to the protection and promotion of human rights for indigenous people.

5. In regard to information, mention was made of the need for a database organized by the United Nations and accessible both to Governments and to organizations and individuals concerned with indigenous people; and for the creation of information networks at the local and regional levels in order to ensure speedy communication, in particular in connection with reporting violations of indigenous rights, through the INTERNET network.

6. It is suggested that censuses should be taken of indigenous people, with the participation of governmental bodies specializing in this field, as a means of supporting economic and social development projects for indigenous people.

National and international legislation

7. It is proposed in this connection that constitutional and legislative reforms should be encouraged that would create mechanisms for the implementation of development programmes and projects that fully respect both the indigenous and non-indigenous sections of the population.

8. In regard to America, it is proposed that an instrument of legal protection should be formulated that would ensure the defence of the rights of indigenous people.

9. At the international level it is recommended that International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 should be ratified in all countries. In addition, support is urged for the contents of the draft universal declaration on indigenous rights in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

10. It is suggested that in the near future the United Nations should promote the relevant mechanisms for the proclamation of an international convention on indigenous people.

Cultural development

11. In this respect, mention was made of the need to implement programmes and projects which revitalize and promote indigenous culture through festivals and through enhancement of the traditions and languages of indigenous people. Programmes should be implemented to educate indigenous children and young people in their own culture.

Health

12. It should be noted that importance was attached to this area, especially as regards the recognition of traditional medicine and its links with official medicine; mention having been made of the need for official medicine to be adapted to the circumstances of indigenous people, it is suggested that a technical meeting should be held in the field of indigenous health (traditional and non-traditional medicine).

Environment and ecology

13. In regard to the environment, it is suggested that specific policies and programmes should be implemented, and that a unit dealing with biodiversity and development of indigenous people should be created in UNDP.

14. In this area it is recommended that chapter 26 of Agenda 21, adopted at the Rio de Janeiro Summit in Brazil, should be taken up again for consideration and implementation.

Financing

15. All the organizations referred to the strengthening of the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and the financing of development projects, as essential requirements for the prosecution of plans and projects for the International Decade of Indigenous People.

16. For the success of the Decade, it is considered important that United Nations specialized agencies which have their own programmes in consultation with indigenous people should maintain permanent contact with the Coordinator for the Decade in order to ensure the successful outcome of all action undertaken for the good of indigenous people. In addition, it is recommended that Governments should be invited to undertake programmes of action in collaboration with indigenous people, to share the resulting information with the Coordinator's office and to make such information available to other Governments and to indigenous people.